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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER SPEAKS OUT ON ISSUES WITH IRAQ,  
IRAN

REF: A. KUWAIT 42  
[1](#)B. 09KUWAIT 1112

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and  
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a wide-ranging January 17 interview with Al-Qabas, a leading Kuwaiti Arabic-language daily, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al Sabah voiced his thoughts on lingering bilateral issues with Iraq and on Kuwait's relations with Iran. Embassy provides the following in-house translation of some of the FM's remarks. The comments provide a useful summing up of GOK positions vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran following a series of high-level Iraqi visits to Kuwait (ref A) and the Prime Minister's November visit to Tehran (ref B), which set the stage for a possible future visit to Tehran by the Amir and an imminent visit to Kuwait by Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani (septel). As noted in the FM's remarks, the GOK is openly irritated by the continuing Iraqi failure to name an Ambassador to Kuwait, resolve the border issue, or complete the search for Kuwaiti missing persons and is deeply worried by continuing instability in Iraq. At the same time, the FM publicly signaled the GOK's willingness to be accommodating on debt and reparations issues and to contribute to Iraqi economic development; the FM also noted GOK plans to fund construction of a hospital in Basra. On Iran, the FM discussed a possible future visit to Tehran by the Amir in his capacity as Chair of the GCC, noted Kuwait's readiness to abide by sanctions on Iran and acknowledged concerns that a "reckless" leadership in Israel could launch a strike on Iran. End Summary.

On Iraq

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[1](#)2. (U) When an Al-Qabas interviewer noted that Iraqi President Jalal Talibani, in an earlier interview with Al-Qabas, had said, "Iraq hopes that Kuwait as a brotherly neighbor would give Iraq a break and not exhaust us financially!" FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al Sabah replied: "What do we want from the Iraq? We want security and peace of mind. We do not want money as money is the last thing on our minds. We want from Iraq good and safe neighborly relations because Iraq is a source of good to us as well as a source of evil for us. We have seen before how Saddam Hussein was the source of evil, and we told the Iraqi brothers on February 26 of last year --- word for word --- that the issue is not about financial obligations but rather about assurances to Kuwait; as a large number of Kuwaitis carry deep doubts regarding the directions of the new Iraq." -- When asked to clarify what he meant by "assurances", Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah said, "Assurances are not just decisions that are taken, they are actions which, over time, help build a sense of security. That is why the debts constitute an issue involving our psychological state, not our financial state. Let us be

clear, We have not asked Iraq to repay the debts and we did not ask anyone else to do so. Debts do not pose a burden on Iraq. Here it is important to point out that here we are talking about debts and not about reparations, which have their own sanctity and a special international mechanism."

-- Dr. Al-Sabah then explained,

"We are talking about the debts which were ratified by the Kuwaiti National Assembly in favor of Iraq. We say to the brothers in Iraq: let us put the mechanism of the debts aside and discuss the real core issue; in other words, our speech (rhetoric) should not be inconsistent. For example, there are Iraqi parliamentarians who glorify what Saddam did against Kuwait!"

-- When asked if there was a mechanism to write off the debts, Dr. Al-Sabah answered,

"The mechanism for writing off debts exists through the National Assembly; but we have to focus on creating the appropriate climate for writing off these debts through the Kuwaiti parliament. But how can the Kuwaiti parliament write off the debts when there are Iraqi parliamentarians who are supportive of what Saddam did in Kuwait? A positive climate to help write off the debts must come through a clear, firm and re-assuring Iraqi message."

-- When asked about border demarcation, the FM said,

"For example, there is a problem related to the maintenance of a pipe that marks the border. So far, the Iraqi side has not abided by the United Nations decisions. There is also the problem of accounting for the remains of the Kuwaitis who were killed, as were thousands of Iraqis under the Saddam regime."

-- Asked what is the truth in this statement, "The Expansion in the UmQasr Port will come at the expense of Kuwait," the FM responded:

"The port in Umm Qasr is Iraqi. However, we promised to help in expanding the water course in Khor Abdulla, so that large commercial tankers can go through. Nevertheless, Umm Qasr, as an area, is Kuwaiti and we do not think of establishing a port in Umm Qasr to compete with the Iraqi port. We are thinking of establishing a port in Boubyan."

-- Asked whether Kuwait intends to build a joint free zone in Southern Iraq, the FM said,

"We are thinking of establishing an industrial zone involving four countries -- namely, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey and Great Britain. It is in Kuwait's interest to see prosperity in Southern Iraq. We benefit from Iraq's stability because this will give us the chance to have security and political, social and economic communications. Security is our number one concern. When your neighbor enjoys prosperity, you can sleep in peace."

-- Asked to respond to the argument that Kuwait is not doing enough to promote development in Basra, or the Iraqi south in general, the FM replied:

"Not at all. It is actually unfair to accuse Kuwait of not doing enough towards the development of Iraq's South. We are witnessing a volatile region in Southern Iraq. The governor of Basra will come as a guest to Kuwait soon in an effort to reinforce the strong relationship between the two countries. (Note: This statement refers to a January 17 - 19 visit to Kuwait by Basra Governor Shaltag Aboud, reported ref A. End Note.)

-- Asked about Iranian intervention in Southern Iraq, the FM said,

"Basra has borders with Iran and Kuwait. I do not blame the Iranians if they interfere in the affairs of southern Iraq because they are concerned that unrest in southern Iraq may affect them."

-- In response to an interviewer's comment that it was clear that the FM had serious concerns about the security situation in Southern Iraq, the FM responded,

"Of course we are concerned about a deterioration in the security situation. If I were not concerned about the safety of my country, I should not be in my position (as FM). I am concerned about three things with regard to southern Iraq: sectarian conflict which may be transferred to Kuwait because it is like a virus. It crosses borders, and this is a political concern. I have a concern that conflicts, terrorism, and remnants of Al-Qaeda may move to Kuwait to

stir up the situation. And thirdly, I have a concern that the collapse of security in Iraq could lead a large number of Iraqis to cross the borders into Kuwait. I fear a human influx as a result of the security collapse on the other side of the border."

-- Asked about the ongoing issue of Iraq's failure to appoint an Ambassador to Kuwait, the FM noted, "The question of appointing an ambassador is a question of sovereignty. Appointing a Kuwaiti Ambassador in Baghdad was of special interest to Kuwait. However, Iraqi failure to appoint an Ambassador to Kuwait has been received with strong astonishment. Diplomatically speaking, it is unacceptable as the Iraqi embassy in Kuwait is without an Ambassador. They provide excuses to which we cannot respond. Their excuse is that there is a strong internal dispute regarding who will take over the position. Delay in the question of naming an Ambassador is unacceptable although it could be attributed to electoral circumstances in Iraq. Kuwait has decided to build a large hospital in southern Iraq; however, security and non-security circumstances do not help."

On Iran

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¶3. (U) In response to an inquiry from an Al-Qabas interview as to whether there had been any coordination with Saudi Arabia prior to Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al Sabah's November 21 - 22 visit to Tehran (reported ref B), the FM responded,

"Prior to the visit to Tehran by the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, I made a call to the Saudi Foreign Minister. The visit came at a time when media campaigns between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalated ahead of the Hajj season. There was a fear that regrettable and disturbing events could recur. This was a key Kuwaiti message given to our friends in Iran. Our Brothers in Saudi Arabia were informed of the assurances which were delivered by the Iranians via Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed. Indeed, the Hajj season this year went without problems."

-- Asked about a possible upcoming visit to Tehran by the Amir, the FM said,

"In his capacity as GCC Summit chairman, the Amir of Kuwait will play a role. We talk about Iran as a big and pivotal country in this region. Any unrest in Iran will reflect on us. Therefore, we, as GCC States, need a delicate dialogue with Iran in which we express our wishes and concerns regarding Iran directly and frankly because we are partners

in the Arabian Gulf basin. We have to work hard in preparation for the Amir's prospective visit to Iran."

-- Asked whether Kuwait would comply with sanctions imposed on Iran, the FM said,

"Of course, our country was liberated by a UN Resolution; therefore, we cannot ignore the international resolutions on Iran."

-- Asked about concerns in GCC countries that sanctions on Iran could come at the expense of GCC states, the FM replied, "It is our fate to be in this region. It is our fate to be neighbors to Iran and to Saddam Hussein. It is our fate to be in this inflammable and volatile region. It is our fate to be in a region where the oldest and most ferocious conflict is namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Asked whether the GOK fears the consequences of an Israeli strike against Iran, the FM said,

"I cannot predict whether there will be an Israeli strike on Iran or not. We have a reckless and crazy fellow ruling Israel and he has a Foreign Minister who has spoken about striking the High Dam in Egypt with an atomic bomb."

Asked why the issue between Iran and Kuwait of the continental shelf has not yet been resolved yet, the FM said,

"The continental shelf is a thorn in Kuwaiti - Iranian relations. This thorn needs to be removed so that the Amir's prospective visit to Tehran will be crowned with the closure of this file. We hope that Iran will agree on holding tripartite negotiations at the nearest chance possible. We have proposed -- in the event of failure to resolve this problem -- to go to the International Court."

¶4. (C) Comment: There has been only a limited public response to the FM's surprisingly straightforward comments in Al-Qabas, although the response of many Kuwaitis appears to

be that it was useful for the FM to lay Kuwaiti positions vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran on the line. While a number of commentators praised the FM's "vivid and unequivocal" description of the "explosive" situation in the Arabian Gulf region, some others -- including some Members of Parliament -- criticized the GOK's plan to fund a hospital in Basra or make any concessions on debt and reparations. For many Kuwaitis, the wounds of the 1990 Iraqi invasion have yet to heal. In their minds, concessions to Iraq while border issues remain unresolved and disappeared Kuwaitis remain missing is hard to swallow. The GOK, also, feels that it has made abundant concessions to Iraq and that it's time for the GOI to "pick up the check" and move forward. End Comment.

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